

February 16, 2022

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and Appropriations Committee members:

I am writing to express my strong support for Connecticut's libraries. I was very happy to see that Governor Lamont's proposed budget maintains funding and services for the State Library.

Over the last two years, Connecticut's public libraries have risen to the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic and have proved once again how important we are to citizens across the state. We pivoted our services during this unprecedented time, taking our programs and services online and serving our communities despite our physical locations being closed. Whether it was answering reference questions from our own homes, performing storytimes over Zoom, updating our websites with links to timely and accurate health information, delivering library materials to residents' doors, or helping to navigate vaccine scheduling, we were there.

The pandemic also demonstrated the vitality of our statewide library services. Since 1976, the borrowItCT system has allowed residents to use their hometown library card at any public library in the state of Connecticut. This has been a national model for cooperation and resource sharing. During the pandemic, the importance of this system became even more apparent, as library patrons were able to easily use other libraries when their own were closed or otherwise offering limited services. Circulation for FY21 at the Canton Public Library, where I am Library Director, was 4.2% higher than it had been in FY19 – an entirely “normal” year – despite being open fewer than our regular hours. This increase was driven in part by residents of neighboring communities, as we reopened to the public earlier than many of our neighbors. State funding makes this reciprocity possible, and allows us to be there for our patrons when they need us most.

Seeing our patrons' faces light up when they returned to the library after our Covid-19 shutdown and hearing their stories about how the library helped them through those days of isolation was truly gratifying. Libraries are an essential service.

I thank the committee for maintaining State Library funding for this year and encourage all of you to talk to library users in your towns – listen to their stories and learn all the different ways that libraries have helped usher our communities through these last months. I am hopeful for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Sarah McCusker  
Library Director, Town of Canton  
Board Member, Connecticut Library Association